

September Dixon Interviewed by Jaime Lopez and Paul Vance

Jaime: Great. Okay. If you could start off by ... Oh, the sound is really echoing on my side.

September Dixon: Yeah.

Jaime: Can you talk real quick?

September Dixon: I can talk. What do you want me to say?

Jaime: Count to 10 again.

September Dixon: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10. Is it still echoing for you?

Jaime: It sounds better.

September Dixon: Okay.

Jaime: The volume is better. Okay, great. [00:00:30] We'll start there and then move on. Can you just start off by telling us your name and your job title and where you live?

September Dixon: September Dixon. I'm an electrician for Local Union #3. I live at (bleeped out).

Jaime: Is that where you were born? Were you born there?

September Dixon: No. Actually I was born in Florida. [00:01:00] Jacksonville, Florida.

Jaime: Jacksonville, Florida, very cool. What's your background?

September Dixon: Bahamian.

Jaime: Where is that?

September Dixon: Bahamas.

Jaime: Bahamas. Oh, that's really nice, that's exotic. What brings you to United States? How did you become an electrician?

September Dixon: Okay, the first is my dad worked for Eastern Air Line, so we traveled all over. We didn't stay anywhere. When people ask I used to say I'm not [00:01:30] from anywhere because it's nowhere that I'm totally attached to. The second question was how did I become an electrician?

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: Well, I've always been interested in it. My grandmother in the Islands owned buildings and things and my grandmother on my mother's side also owned properties as well. So wherever we were as kids we had to learn how to do construction stuff.

[00:02:00] The one thing you couldn't touch however, was electrical. Of course as a kid what do you wanna do? What you can't do.

Jaime: Sure.

September Dixon: This desire build up and I didn't pursue it immediately I was in a different career. I was working in Parsons Brinckerhoff as an office engineer. That's a main. I'm not an engineer. It's an [00:02:30] office engineer, that's just that's the person that does everything in office.

I actually worked with the field engineers they were part of my task. So there was an electrical one, a tower guy and we were doing Delta Terminal A in Boston Logan Airport. So I got really close with all of them of course, but the electrical one especially because I always interested. So I would always quiz him, talk to him about stuff and he really [00:03:00] is probably the one that ignited and let me know, "You can do it," and all that because other than that it's foreign to you. It's like a dream, he was the one who was like, "No, you can do this, you got this."

That was great but then my husband and I got pregnant and everything went crazy. I ended up coming [00:03:30] here and joining a local #3 because I was now out of work. So I ended up joining Local 3 through because I was now out of work, so I ended up joining Local 3 through NEW I don't know if you know what a NEW program.

Jaime: I'm not familiar with that. Can you explain what new is?

September Dixon: NEW is Nontraditional Employment for Women. It's a six-week where you learn how to do every trade and then at the end you choose, which field you would like to go into and they assist you with [00:04:00] that. They're great really, they overkill.

Jaime: Yeah.

September Dixon: Yes so you got to carry a plaster bucket, like stuff that we don't do.

Jaime: They toughen you up?

September Dixon: Yeah they overkill, which is great because if you go and you're a painter you gonna have to carry that or if you're a plumber you may, whatever. It's a pretty good program. Now I came in 2008 [00:04:30] and I've worked a lot with NEW as well, at the same time as I was coming through the program.

Paul: Coming through the apprenticeship program?

September Dixon: Right the apprenticeship program. So I taught classes over there and did interviews for them over there and then that all stopped once we go to MIJ. Because MIJ was all over the place and I loved [00:05:00] it though ... During my apprenticeship I appreciated it because I was able to touch almost everything. BMS work, I worked at a graveyard, I worked in hospitals, I worked in colleges, Fordham University. I did everything. I did switch gear, I did everything from four-inch galv down to BMS work.

Jaime: So this was at your MIJ here?

September Dixon: [00:05:30] This was during my whole apprenticeship, but a lot in my MIJ time, yeah.

Jaime: It's intensified during MIJ time?

September Dixon: Not only that, you switch a lot of shop sometimes. If you don't come out of that fourth year with a home, if you will, and was doing Transit, so at that time, you couldn't be at MIJ in Transit. So, once my apprenticeship part was over and I had to go to MIJ, I [00:06:00] had to go back out into the world and that was what ended up being a lot of different shops. Those different shops gave me the different experiences.

So say with my first shop. My first shop I did AV work, which is audio visual, soldering, all this type of thing, stuff that some people will never see, ever.

Paul: Anymore or just ...

September Dixon: No, just in an apprenticeship, it's like a lottery.

Paul: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: Sometimes you touch this, sometimes you [00:06:30] don't.

Paul: Yep.

September Dixon: So some people will never see it. It's not that common that we do stuff like that. We don't create this wire, we don't do that in the connector. We don't usually do that, it usually comes prefab. So, to be able to do that onsite and right there was very exciting, it was good for me.

Paul: Can you backtrack real quick. You said you were employed with the airline as a-

September Dixon: No, my dad worked for Eastern [00:07:00] Airline.

Paul: Right, so your office engineer job.

September Dixon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul: When you got pregnant.

September Dixon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul: They fired you or [crosstalk 00:07:13]

September Dixon: They didn't fire me. When my husband and I got pregnant, I got sick, on the job actually. I got sick and it's preeclampsia, it's a disease where your blood pressure spikes really, really high and [00:07:30] you will die.

Paul: Oh my God.

September Dixon: And the only way you won't die and the only way to cure it is to birth the child, to give birth to the child, but I was 24 weeks.

Paul: Oh, wow.

September Dixon: So I had to go into the hospital, I had to stay there, they tried to stop it, it didn't work and then they went in and they took him out and he was silly, he's very [00:08:00] silly, he was swimming around trying to hide from the doctor. She's like, "He's hiding from me." I'm like, "He knows it's not time to come out, he's not stupid." We're very close, the doctor and I.

Paul: [crosstalk 00:08:15]

September Dixon: Yes, so we're laughing and stuff. Mind you, I'm cut open. My girlfriend is right here next to me, my lifelong girlfriend and she is silly as the day is long. So I'm gonna backtrack a little. I told you I got sick on the job, it was a retirement party [00:08:30] for one of the other guys and I told them, I'm like, "I don't feel good. I don't really want to go," and I called my doctor as well and they said, "Go get your blood pressure checked and let us know what it is."

At the airport you have a little healthcare place, but they only do like drug tests and stuff so I couldn't go anywhere, I'm on an airport. So I told them, "I don't really want to go to the retirement party." "Well, Bob is not gonna like it because he already thinks you don't like him."

Paul: Oh my gosh.

September Dixon: I'm like, "I love [00:09:00] Bob. What is the problem? I just don't feel good."

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: So I went anyway. I got talked into going and I'm sitting beside my boss and I'm just feeling progressively worse and I'm like, "John, just feel my leg." I know that

sounds strange, but I'm like, "John, feel my leg 'cause it might just be me, I might be overreacting, but feel my leg." He goes to touch my leg and it's like a brick, like hard, hard.

Paul: Really?

September Dixon: Yeah, because when the blood pressure [00:09:30] is so high, it's doing this, it's like an extreme thing happening in your body. He's like, "Ah, we gotta go." So I ruined the whole retirement party because everybody got up and left to bring me to the hospital.

Paul: Oh my God. That's crazy. So your job, you [crosstalk 00:09:52]

September Dixon: A hard time. They didn't give me a hard time at all. Once I was in the hospital and I had the baby and they all came up and saw me looking the worst I could look at, [00:10:00] ever in my life. Then they brought the boxes of work for me.

Paul: No, way.

Jaime: When you were in the hospital?

September Dixon: Yeah, they would bring my work to the hospital once I was better. Once I got better, yeah, they'd bring my work to the hospital. I'm like, "Just bring it. I don't care, just bring it," 'cause I used to work from home sometimes too so it was a very flexible job. It was a great job actually. No, they didn't do anything wrong.

I was supposed to transfer here to the FDR project, [00:10:30] but once all that stuff happened with the baby, that was off the table because when they want you to come they want you come and that's it. That's the only thing, but I finished out the project that I was on. I finished that project out and to their defense also, we had the best health coverage ever. It was something crazy, a crazy number, I don't remember what it was ... he was in there five months, six days. So it's like [00:11:00] \$770,000 or something crazy. I never paid a dime.

Jaime: Was it a union job?

September Dixon: No.

Jaime: Was it a city job?

September Dixon: No, that just a private company.

Jaime: Private company, great.

September Dixon: Yeah, so I never dish out a dime. They had nurses come to my house once I went home. It was great, they were awesome.

Paul: Cool.

Jaime: So why Transition into New York into this job?

September Dixon: Okay, so life is tough, as we know. The baby [00:11:30] lived five months, six days like I said and then he passed, but in the middle of his illness ... it's okay ... in the middle of his illness, my husband's mother who lived here in New York got sick and was in a coma. So both of them were on breathing tubes and feeding tubes.

Jaime: Oh my God.

September Dixon: His mother and the baby. So I stayed with the baby and he came to work here and take care of his mother and then he would come home on the weekends to see the baby and so it was [00:12:00] thing going on. Then when the baby died, I came to help with his mother, here, and then three weeks later she died. So then we were just stuck here kind of 'cause I'm not working anymore, he's working here, so we were here.

Then I started doing real estate and I was great at that ... I have to say, I'm sorry, I was.

Jaime: Why do you think that?

September Dixon: Because they told me that and because I sold five houses [00:12:30] in four months. I think that's a good record.

Jaime: So what's so special that you have that made you successful in that field?

September Dixon: I'm very visual. If you tell me a story right now, I'll see the story in my head, so I'm very visual. When I walk into a house, I just look around and I can furnish it in my mind, like I can see it and then I tell you that. I say, "You can have a sectional right here and then in the corner over there you can put a big screen TV, [00:13:00] it swivels, so even if you're in the kitchen you can watch it." I'm good with that, yeah.

Jaime: So let me ask you a question. How does that Transition into your job now? Does it make it easier to do your job? How does it affect your job now?

September Dixon: Once again, when it comes to the visualization, it has a lot to do with communication as well. So, depending on the communicator, depends on how well I can see what they want me to do.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: Or my experience. [00:13:30] If I already had an experience with it, then I know what to do and I can even tweak it. See how beautiful that is, look, that looks

like wings to me. The way they swung out, each box on each side, it looks like an angelic wing.

Paul: Can you describe what you're looking at right now [crosstalk 00:13:51]?

September Dixon: Sorry.

Jaime: That's funny.

September Dixon: I'm looking at pipes coming out of a panel, connecting to boxes on either side of it [00:14:00] and those boxes on either side of it are above it, almost ceiling level. So coming out of the panel there are five pipes, one, the middle one, goes straight up and the other two fan out like wings, so it connects to the two boxes on either side.

Jaime: Okay.

September Dixon: That stuff, I find [00:14:30] good pipe benders artistic. Yeah, I think it's like an art form. It can be beautiful, it can be flowing water, it's just ... I don't know ... I'm strange like that.

Jaime: No, no [crosstalk 00:14:47]

September Dixon: My mind is a little different so that's how I see it. I see it like artwork. So if it's crooked or something it kinda bothers me a little bit, [00:15:00] but not to the point where I'm crazy about it or anything. Yeah, electrical work is different than I thought as people that I meet now, also have a misconception about it. All they say we do is twist wires together. "Oh, you twist wires together, that's it."

Paul: Who said this?

September Dixon: Most people, the general population, they think all you do is twist wires together.

Jaime: What do you think you do? If you were to express it back [00:15:30] to them, it's like, "It's not just twisting wires." What else is it?

September Dixon: I tell them all the time. I say, "Yes, twisting wires together is one part of our job. However, we do everything from dig trenches to lay down pipe to fiber and manholes, pumping water, lifting heavy equipment and/or material. We do everything, it's not just twisting two wires together." That's how I explain [00:16:00] it to them.

Jaime: You have any family in the business?

September Dixon: I do. I have one cousin that I met when I was here. That's another funny story. My mom and my grandmother went to a family reunion in Savannah, Georgia.

My mom then calls me, here in New York, at work, and says, "You have a cousin in New York." I [00:16:30] said, "Oh yeah? That's nice." She puts her on the phone. She's like, "Oh my God! Hi!" She's very excitable. I love her. She's, "Oh my God, I didn't know I had any ..." She said, "You live right around the corner from me." We both live in Electhester. I live on Parsons, she lives Jewel, right at the corner of 164 and I live on Parsons close to 65, so we're like this.

[00:17:00] She's been in the business 15 years or whatever, but like I said, I didn't know this 'cause I didn't know her 'cause I didn't grow up here, so I didn't know her, but now we're tight and everything. For me, I'm still like first generation because ... she and I are both first generation, so there's nobody older than us, no.

Paul: Can you describe the area that you live in now, Electhester?

September Dixon: [00:17:30] Parsons? Yes, okay so Electhester where I live, I'm in a courtyard. In the middle of it, there's a flagpole, there's lots of shrubbery and pretty flowers and pathways and I take a lot of pictures so if you need any, I'll give them to you.

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: Yes, I take a lot of pictures and they love them on Instagram. I like when it's foggy in the morning. When I come out and it's foggy and the lights are all lit up it reminds me [00:18:00] of London or something from books I used to read. I told you I'm visual, so I saw what I read, so it reminds me of London and it's just nice. The lights are lit up, the fog is just flowing across the top of them and the top of buildings are almost ... you just can barely make them out. It's beautiful when you go out in the morning, to me. A lot of people are not ready to go to work at that [00:18:30] time, of course, but for me, I'm over there clicking pictures and they're walking through the pathway like, "Get out of my way you peasant. What are you doing?"

Paul: Did you get into that area through the union, Electhester? What was that process like?

September Dixon: Yes, Electhester is or was electrician housing.

Paul: Okay.

September Dixon: So it started with Harry Van Arsdale, that was his vision and there's a strip mall, there's the whole [00:19:00] housing complex, which spans three blocks one way, three blocks the next way, I guess. To get in there, you just write a letter. You write a letter to Peggy Hackett and you say, "Hey, Peggy. I'm looking to get in here. I have a family. I'll help out with the Christmas party or the ... what is that thing that they do every summer?

Jaime: The fair? The street fair?

September Dixon: The fair, the street fair or whatever, [00:19:30] "I'll go door to door and do the ... when the elections come around, like whatever," and you get right in.

Jaime: So would that be like a community participation? How does the community work?

September Dixon: Okay, so a lot of times ... what I usually do, I do the street fair. I'll do the street fair. Literally, it's out my back window. So I hear them shuffling around and then I get up early, it's like [00:20:00] maybe six o'clock and you go out and you go into one of the buildings, you sign in and they give you an assignment. You do something. However, throughout the course of the day, I might see you, you might need a hand, I might see you, you might ... so you're just running around all day. Then you go home. There's a shift, so you can do, say, seven in the morning till 12 or 12 till seven at night, whatever, there's a [00:20:30] shift or you could stay all day depending on how you feel if you like it out there. Sometimes I stay it all day.

Paul: Is there a requirement to get into Electhester?

September Dixon: No, it's not a requirement to get into Electhester-

Paul: They'll help you move along faster possibly if you-

September Dixon: It used to. Now, Electhester has changed a little.

Paul: Oh really?

September Dixon: Yeah, so they receive funding from the City, so now they have to follow different regulations per the City. So now it's a little different. Now [00:21:00] people with Section 8 are able to move in, like different dynamics of people can move in now, whereas before it was mostly electrician and then they used to let police officers and corrections officers in.

Paul: Oh they did?

September Dixon: Yeah, and that was it though, but now it seems to be open to anyone, yeah.

Jaime: Did you tell us how many years you've been in the business already?

September Dixon: I've been in the business [00:21:30] eight years, 2008 till now. What is this? This is May, so in about five more months it'll be nine.

Paul: Yeah? Congratulations.

September Dixon: Thank you. Yeah, that's how long I've been in it, eight years.

Jaime: Do you remember your first day at work?

September Dixon: My first day at work? Woo, let's see? I was at Campbell & Dawes. [00:22:00] Yes, I remember it. First day of work was at the Bank of American building over by, I think that's Harold Square, I think ... don't ... it's a big one. It was a big job back then in 2008 and it's right near that Army recruitment thing that got blown up. It got blown up that day, so that's why I remember my first day.

Paul: [00:22:30] What?

Jaime: What Army recruitment center?

September Dixon: It's in the middle of the street. It's just like this little box thing by Bank of America and they blew it up. I don't know why they blew it up. I have no idea. That's what I remember my first day.

Jaime: But before we touch base on that, did you remember what you saw, who you met, how you felt, those kind of things?

September Dixon: We were on a ... that building was huge. We were on [00:23:00] a very high floor, I remember that. It was almost complete though so the job wasn't at roughing stage, it was more towards completion and there were lots of people still there and since I was [inaudible 00:23:15] of course, I had coffee, it's like 40 guys.

Jaime: Yeah [inaudible 00:23:21]

September Dixon: Yeah, so you take the hand truck so you can pile the boxes on top and bring it back, but the great thing about that was every day [00:23:30] ... no, I probably shouldn't say that part ... we'll leave that out ... I'll tell you later because guys will stop doing it. I made like \$100 days off coffee.

Jaime: Well you could say I [crosstalk 00:23:44]

September Dixon: No, because guys will stop doing it. I see them all the time on the job now. They're so cheap. They're so cheap.

Jaime: Tell us how were you making that money.

September Dixon: Tips.

Jaime: Exactly, so why is that wrong? Can you explain to us?

September Dixon: Guys will stop [00:24:00] giving the tips if they know the apprentices are making that, they're just cheap. You know what I mean? They're not nice.

Paul: [inaudible 00:24:07] cheap man for being [inaudible 00:24:08].

Jaime: Why would a journeyman or journeywoman tip you?

September Dixon: Why would they tip you?

Jaime: Yeah.

September Dixon: Because you gave them good service. If you asked me to get you a coffee and you asked me to get you hazelnut, but because they didn't have hazelnut and I couldn't get in contact with you, I got you a something close to that ... I don't know coffee [00:24:30] ... something close to that, you're gonna tip me because I tried. If you make sure you bring back the condiments, the sugar, the salt, the pepper, the straws, the napkins, they tip you because you're good at what you're doing.

Jaime: Right.

September Dixon: And they're encouraging you 'cause it all lays over into work 'cause we order material. We have to be meticulous with whatever we do, whatever job we have. We have to make sure we have everything because sometimes we can't [00:25:00] go back down or we can't get back to wherever the material is, we have to make sure we have everything. So if you go to coffee and you're leaving the spoons, they look at you differently.

Paul: Or if you come back late.

September Dixon: Or if you come back late or any of these things, they look at you differently, they're like this, "They're not really into it." You know?

Jaime: So you did well. You did well your first year, you made some extra funds and the guys and girls on the job, they [00:25:30] liked you and they tipped you well. What's wrong with that?

September Dixon: There's nothing wrong with it but like I said, I see these guys now.

Paul: [inaudible 00:25:36]

September Dixon: I see these guys now and 2008 was bad.

Paul: Forget what city you work in.

September Dixon: Remember it was a bad time, 2008.

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: So that's when we should have been holding on to the purse strings, not now.

Paul: No, [inaudible 00:25:51]

September Dixon: Right.

Jaime: Can you tell me about your learning process? You say you're a visual learner and you see things very [00:26:00] visually. Can you explain your learning process, at work and throughout your life?

September Dixon: Okay, so I'm hands on. I like to learn by doing it. Not to say I can't learn by hearing it, that's fine, but I like to learn by doing it. I'm mechanically inclined, I like to do things with my hands. So the first job that I was on with Sandy, [00:26:30] it was a lot of old timers and they put me in a room like this where it's just a table in the middle and it's maybe three or four old timers sitting over there and three or four old timers sitting over here and me and they're making it whips.

Jaime: Whips, those are what?

September Dixon: Those are just electrical tails hanging from a box, it's just a receptacle box. It was like four receptacles in the box and then they had this whip.

Jaime: So it was like a fabrication station?

September Dixon: Right, and so that's what they had the old timers do, [00:27:00] which was awesome. I loved that because they were taking care of them.

Jaime: How so?

September Dixon: Well, they served their time. They're about to retire, they should be climbing in ceilings and under crawl spaces. All that should be over for them.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: So if you can, you can't at every job, we all know that, but if you can accommodate them, you don't have myself, an apprentice, a bunch of apprentices around the table making up those whips. No, you let the old [00:27:30] timers do that and they can train one at a time like they did me. They can train an apprentice at a time, but let that be their job and let the younger guys do all the hard stuff.

Jaime: So you had six old timers around you and they teaching you some of these. What are some of the most-

September Dixon: Memorable?

Jaime: Memorable things that they taught you?

September Dixon: About retiring. About how to build your pension credits, how [00:28:00] to stay working, how to have a good work ethics, maintain your tools, always keep up

with your tools, they gave me tools, like they grandfathered me tools, which was nice.

Jaime: Do you remember a specific tool that you got grandfathered?

September Dixon: My Klein strippers because they don't even make those anymore.

Jaime: What do they look like?

September Dixon: They're just yellow. They look like they should be a part of a Tonka Toys.
[00:28:30] They're just yellow with really wide handles, they're just simple, they're very simple.

Jaime: What did that mean to you when you received that tool and still use it today?

September Dixon: I didn't know those guys back then. I just had met them, so right then, at that particular moment, the meaning hadn't built up, like I didn't know, you know? But once I kept working with them and I knew them, yeah, so now, [00:29:00] I have my first apprentice and I let her use the strippers.

Jaime: You let her use the strippers that they gave you.

September Dixon: Right, I let her use the strippers.

Jaime: Wow.

September Dixon: She's learning. I learned on those strippers, now she's learning on those strippers. She went to get transferred, I'm like, "Oh, no, you got to give the strippers back though," and I gave her a different one.

Jaime: So you bought her a new pair or strippers?

September Dixon: Right. I'm like, "You can have this, but give me that. I gotta keep that," [00:29:30] because I see guys come in and out and I see them meet up with each other, like years later, like, "Yeah, I still have those [flies 00:29:38] you gave me."

Paul: Oh my God.

September Dixon: Right, so you might see this person. I probably will never see them again because they were about to retire, right, but if I happened to come across them at the hall at an event, whatever, I can say, "Yeah, I still have those."

Paul: That's great.

Jaime: So thinking about when you received those strippers at the beginning of your career [00:30:00] and then you giving a new pair to your apprentice, how does it feel? What's the reflection? What are you thinking about when that happens?

September Dixon: Whenever I'm working with apprentices, I try to treat them good. That might be a bad thing because I know you're supposed to be tough on apprentices or whatever, but I try to be good to them. It doesn't matter what apprentice I'm working with, if it's my apprentice or just apprentices on the job, I always try to give them something, a test, a this or that, whatever, [00:30:30] the plug in tester, anything, give them something to add to their tool bag to give them the love that I have of collecting tools. I'll show them things, like, "Look, I'm gonna get this dremel and yeah," you know? I try to give them that same excitement about buying tools.

So, for me to give her those tools, it's a normal thing for me, it wasn't extra, but hopefully, my hope is, yeah, [00:31:00] she appreciates it and I see her years down the line, when I'm about to retire and she says, "I still have those."

Paul: How do you go about working with an apprentice and trying to teach them and inspire them to be quality work like you or like another ... 'cause not every apprentice is the same?

September Dixon: I've only had one apprentice, like I said, [00:31:30] just one and she was TA 1. She was really though. She took off with the wall sconces, she did, she took off and the receptacles. She catches on fast and that's what they said about me when I was in Sandy, "Oh, she catches on fast. She catches on fast." I know she's gonna do all right. I know she's gonna be fine and she loves to ask questions, so my crew, it was three or four of us, I could catch her talking to one of the other guys and them drawing out [00:32:00] a three-way circuit or whatever.

She was interested in something, she'll ask, which is great, but she's super quiet. Like she's really, really quiet, so a lot of the guys took it as ... I don't know what they took it as, but she's just quiet. She's just quiet like that. My daughter is like that, so I automatically took her in even more because I already know, she's not [00:32:30] being rude, she's not ignoring you or anything, she's just quiet, that's it. One of the guys says to me, "Oh, she never speaks when I ... " I said, "She is speaking," but she's just like, "Good morning," and it's a construction site, it's noisy, you know? So I told her, I said, "You gotta get a little tougher, just a little bit."

Paul: That's funny.

Jaime: Just thinking about your apprentice [00:33:00] and you said that you took her in a little more. Was there somebody that did that for you throughout your apprenticeship?

September Dixon: Let's see.

Paul: [inaudible 00:33:13]

September Dixon: I wouldn't say there was an individual, I would say it's more like a group effort. I was really active and then, like I said, I was on a couple of jobs, so on different jobs you mess with different people [00:33:30] and they teach you different things. They take you on that job, this person took me under their wing on that job. The one person I can really think of that took me under their wing and was almost even protective, like I am with her, his name is Dev Fallon. Devon Fallon, he was not only a good mechanic and smart, he does Transit. I did a lot of Transit.

Paul: It's hard work?

September Dixon: Yes, it [00:34:00] is. So, me, being an apprentice, being silly, I'm trying to tightly bend this 90 around like this. Yeah, Transit, right, but in Transit they don't anybody to be able to hang off of anything. So they don't want that, but I didn't know that. I was coming from C&D, which was more like commercial work. So yeah, you bend your 90s, you go around the corner, you keep going 'cause they're gonna put a ceiling [00:34:30] up and, boom, it's done. But Transit, everything is exposed, so they don't want that loop 'cause the kids, I guess, hang on it. So he's like, "What are you doing?" and I'm like, "Ah, bending this 90, what do you mean what am I doing?" He's like, "No."

Paul: [inaudible 00:34:46]

September Dixon: He may as well have slapped his forehead no, nope. I'm like, "Okay, what?" He's like, "All you have to do is get all [inaudible 00:34:55] blah, blah, blah, blah, the condulets, two condulets one LL, one LL, boom, you're done." [00:35:00] That was the most simple thing but I would have never got it. Never.

Paul: If no one had ever showed you probably, right?

September Dixon: Right, no-

Paul: I mean not like-

September Dixon: Yeah, I probably would have seen it eventually or I would have seen it eventually. You know what I mean, like seen it somewhere.

Paul: Just look.

September Dixon: Right, just look around. Yeah, but I was working with him, so he taught me that, which was great. [00:35:30] You know Bobby Parisi? You ever heard of him?

Jaime: Bobby who?

September Dixon: Bobby Parisi.

Jaime: Sounds familiar.

September Dixon: He's a big general foreman in Kleinburg. He was really good too. He was really good, he's a really nice guy. He's a stand-up gentleman and he's very understanding for a general foreman. We as women, we come into this business and we have a lot [00:36:00] of male supervisors that don't understand women apparently. They have no mothers, no sisters, no daughters, no cousins or anything that are female.

Paul: [inaudible 00:36:10]

September Dixon: Right. We have a little joke in the Local, like they must bring them all in from all male camp and drop them off at the job and then pick them all up at three o'clock and bring them back because ...

Paul: Like the city of [inaudible 00:36:25]

September Dixon: Yeah because they act like they don't understand anything. You can [00:36:30] tell them, "Listen, I'm sick this week." If I say, "I'm sick this week," something is going on this week, okay? Then they're like, "Oh, no, no, don't give it ... " You can't catch it fool. So we try to, in every job, you have to invent a new way to tell them, "Listen, this is happening, it's really happening." Like they're having a baby themselves, no way, this is really happening.

Paul: [00:37:00] But this foreman understanding of the situation?

September Dixon: He was very understanding. So he had straws underneath him and I told the guy, he was my direct foreman. I'm like, "Listen, I can't carry that today. Can't do it. Can't do it." "You better get that." So I go and I carry it, oops, "Okay, now I gotta go home." So I just leave. I just leave and they're all calling me [00:37:30] and whatever 'cause I'm underground.

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: So I get home and we talking, whatever and I tell him and he's like, "Listen, you don't have to do anything if ..." He's like, "Don't ever do that again." He said, "Tell me, every time, and I'll tell them not to bother you," because they don't get it. I'm not trying to duck work, I'm not trying to sneak out. There's an [00:38:00] issue. There's an issue. Let's rock with that. Nope, they want to know every detail. They want to know every detail.

Paul: [inaudible 00:38:11] work a job today.

September Dixon: Right, let me sit down here. No, but you can still work, but you just can't do the extra. You can't carry a bundle of [inaudible 00:38:21], you can't do this extra heavy stuff that's gonna make your muscles-

Paul: [inaudible 00:38:26]

September Dixon: Yeah. Like you can't do that right now. I can't do that right now. Let [00:38:30] me do, let me just put this connect to that one and let me do this.

Jaime: Yeah.

Paul: Has there ever a tool or a location that you might have been scared to work with or-

September Dixon: Didn't I just tell him I do all hard and heavy work. That's like everywhere, everywhere I've been, okay. So Fordham University, you have that. You would have to climb in the ceiling so you can get to the hallway to poke the hole through [00:39:00] but there was such a big ... what do you call this again ... the column, it's not a [calder 00:39:08] column, but what is that called again.

Jaime: The soffit or-

September Dixon: Yeah, it's a big soffit that you have to climb in to get over there to put the hole in the wall so you can put your pipe out into the hallway and continue your run.

Paul: Oh my God. How high is the ceiling?

September Dixon: For the University? It's probably, it was an auditorium, it's taller than this.

Paul: Wow.

September Dixon: It had to be like 40, [00:39:30] maybe 40 feet, I don't know. It was crazy.

Paul: That's insane.

September Dixon: It was fine though, it's not like it's not fine.

Paul: Yeah, of course.

September Dixon: I find it was fun, whatever. I just didn't like it was very dirty and dusty and that I don't know what it was.

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: That's the only thing I didn't like.

Paul: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: It's like, "What is up there," and it's dark and you just have that little light and that's it. It's really dark.

Paul: What is up there?

September Dixon: Right, suppose a rat came out of that thing. You know what I mean? I used to be terrified [00:40:00] of that.

Paul: There are like birds ... I mean-

September Dixon: Birds, anything, right? So I was like, "Arghhhhh!" So you can get scared anywhere and the very first time I did a deck job was second year ... was it second or third? Maybe third. They only have the yellow mesh around the whole thing, it's 60 stories.

Paul: That's huge.

September Dixon: I was on the ... whatever floor they were pouring, I was always on the floor right below. So [00:40:30] you're freezing, 43rd and 10th.

Paul: [inaudible 00:40:34]

September Dixon: 42nd and 10th. 42nd and 10th, the [Moma 00:40:37] Building and that [Hotel 00:40:38]

Paul: Must be [inaudible 00:40:40]

September Dixon: Yeah, so, yeah, it's freezing, the water is right there, right?

Paul: The wind is going.

September Dixon: And the wind is whipping and your afraid of heights and there's no walls.

Paul: Are you afraid of heights?

September Dixon: I was then. That's where I lost it, on that job. I lost the fear for heights on that job.

Jaime: You cured your fear of heights.

September Dixon: Yeah because you have to ... [00:41:00] you're like over there, scared to death-

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:41:02]

Paul: What's that?

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:41:07]

Jaime: [inaudible 00:41:07]

Paul: Sorry.

September Dixon: Yeah, so you're scared to death and then after a while, after you still have to rough out, you just stop getting scared. You go a little closer ... at first I only worked in the center ... like I working this another floor, like have the other people do the outside and then you ventured out a little [00:41:30] further, a little further and then finally, you just ... it's like nothing. After a while, I'm just like leaning over with the glazes, "What are you all doing? What are you doing?" You know?

Jaime: You're checking it out, enjoying the sights.

September Dixon: I have one picture with one of the guys, he's like ... he's crazy, I wouldn't do this stuff. He sticks a ... there's a pipe sticking out of a window into nothingness and he has one hand on the pipe and he's diagonally leaning out [00:42:00] and has his feet inside the building, "Take the picture, take the picture!" I'm like, "Yeah, fool, you're crazy."

Paul: Uh-oh.

September Dixon: I would never, that I couldn't do, but as long as that orange mesh is around, I feel a wall, I'm good. Now I'm good.

Paul: The idea of a wall is there.

September Dixon: The idea of the wall is there, that's right. I have a mental wall up.

Jaime: You said you're about nine years in [00:42:30] now and you've been through a variety of works, Transit, [crosstalk 00:42:34], soldering [crosstalk 00:42:35]

September Dixon: So, that means that my pull meant nothing. Don't ask me any questions.

Jaime: No, [inaudible 00:42:38] probe, but which type of work do you feel like you most excel at or that you feel most comfortable doing?

September Dixon: Hmm, firstly, anything I do I try to excel at. Secondly, the one that I like the most, [00:43:00] it would probably be BMS only because there's a lot of ... it's like switches and it's a lot of thinking to do by motor control type stuff, hooking up the BMS panel itself, and running all ... So, when you do BMS, you don't just do ... a lot of people think that is also light work.

Paul: Can [00:43:30] you explain what BMS is real quick?

September Dixon: Building Maintenance Systems. So a lot people think that that's light work as well, but no. You have to come from water, whatever unit you're coming from, the chiller, this, that, whatever, you have the pipe all the way wherever the panel is, so wherever it is. Once you build this whole system to every single-

Paul: Specification.

September Dixon: The vice that's in that room because whatever the plumbers are doing, they have sensors on that. They have sensors [00:44:00] on almost everything. The way Building Maintenance Systems work, they control the environment in your office or your building.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: So they turn heat on and off, they turn the AC on and off, they lift the shades, if you will, sometimes, daylight savings time stuff, they ... what else ... what else, so what else do they do. The Building Maintenance System just makes it comfortable to work in this building. [00:44:30] So anything that it affects, we have to connect to.

Jaime: Right, so that connects to a central pattern of sorts.

September Dixon: Right. The only way we can connect to these things, sometimes, is through pipe work. Other times BMS is even better. You can run it freehand, like fire alarm.

Jaime: In the [inaudible 00:44:53] any, right?

September Dixon: Yes, so sometimes it's even better because you don't have to pipe out.

Jaime: [00:45:00] Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: For the most part, the jobs that I've been on, you have to pipe out. It's not that easy.

Paul: Why is that?

September Dixon: Why?

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: That's the specification of the customer. That's what they want. So one, Transit, nothing is really freehand in Transit, nothing. So Transit, they want everything piped out and I did a lot of Transit work. Also, Con Ed, everything piped out. What else did we pipe out? Oh, [00:45:30] the big graveyard in Brooklyn, I don't remember the name of it, down there near 4th Street or something, it's a big graveyard, they also wanted all that stuff piped out. That may be because their location. It was really wet when we were working in that building so maybe ... I don't know. I don't know why they would want because we were doing a crib basically.

Paul: [00:46:00] Creepy.

September Dixon: Yeah, we were doing. So you had vaults for the bodies. There were people from out-of-state doing the concrete part over here, on the side of us, that were doing the vaults that the bodies would end up going into.

Paul: Wow.

September Dixon: Then we would have to pipe from down where we were, where the water was, up to where it was active space and it that active space was the crematory.

Paul: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

September Dixon: So I was working over people that were being cremated, [00:46:30] actively being cremated on a daily basis.

Paul: [crosstalk 00:46:35]

September Dixon: Yeah.

Paul: How was that room?

September Dixon: Not bad. Not bad actually. No, the room was not hot. It's a room about maybe ... it's probably bigger than this room. A little bigger than this room and then say over here, they have three ovens, huge ovens and that's where they put the people in and then they bring them out. Then, over here, in the middle ... so in the back corner will be the ovens, in the middle, [00:47:00] there was a ... I don't know what you would call that machine, but it divided teeth and braces and if you had fillings, it divided all the stuff that couldn't be burnt.

Paul: Your job, your task was to send power to all these devices?

September Dixon: This was an active area, it was already working, this part was already working. So we were piping above him. We were just going to the roof.

Paul: All right.

September Dixon: So we were going from the basement where [00:47:30] we had to do this new extension. They were doing a new extension onto this graveyard. So we had to pipe from the new extension to the roof because most BMS systems derive from the roof. They have units up there. So, that's where we were going.

Paul: How does this work in active space?

September Dixon: You have to be clean, you have to be quiet and professional. That's all I can say as far as working in an active space. You [00:48:00] have to realize you're not alone, this is somebody's house or business or job on the line, so you can't do whatever you want, like you can in Transit. I had to get that in there.

Jaime: So you're saying that the systems are very intricate and they control the environment in the buildings. Can you tell us a little bit more about the inner workings of those systems and what attracts you most to that work?

September Dixon: [00:48:30] Now, all I know how to do is wire it up. I don't know the inner workings because I don't. All I know is I know how the cooling unit works, I can tell you when we bring our power into the cooling unit in our BMS ... because there's a ... we put little units inside and then those are the units that connect to the panel outside. In cooling a [00:49:00] building, that system may bring the water in, cool it to a certain temperature, our thermometer is there and it says, "Okay, now it's cool enough to shoot back out into the other system to cool the building." This is as much as I know about how it works inside. We don't really wire the inside of those.

Jaime: Right, [crosstalk 00:49:22]

September Dixon: I'm not really good at that. I know how to wire outside. That's it.

Paul: Bring power and you get the switches work.

September Dixon: [00:49:30] I need to study it. I do need study it more, but that's why I said, "Don't ask me on the technical questions because I don't know."

Jaime: Well, you're learning, you're in process.

September Dixon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jaime: But you like that type of work and want to it pursue it more. You said you were in school right now.

September Dixon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jaime: You're gonna go take a class, actually, right after this interview.

September Dixon: Yes.

Paul: In 10 minutes.

Jaime: 10 minutes. Can you tell us a little bit about the class you're taking now?

September Dixon: I'm doing a high voltage splicing class right now. Now that class, I actually started this process [00:50:00] about three years ago. You take high voltage theory first and then you have to wait for the class to fill up enough to do a high voltage splicing or tester class. I get called for the high voltage splicing class and I started a little over a month ago.

Here you work with hot solder to create a seal on a piece of lead pipe [00:50:30] to close up a splice that you may have made for whatever reason. This is also very intricate work, very time consuming and a little heavy because solder is metal so when you're playing with it, the ladles are very heavy, of course, because they have to be cast iron to be in 900 degree [00:51:00] solder.

This work is very detailed and dangerous if you don't do it right. I've been in it for about a month and I like it.

Paul: What made you take this class or how did you find out about this class?

September Dixon: Before I came to Local 3, I had gone to Local 25 for the International High Voltage Splicers. So I was gonna do that, [00:51:30] but what they do is they're outside ... like you can work in the woods for a week and it's no bathroom, it's nothing, so that's really just like a just-guy job. It's just a guy job.

Paul: Leave it to them.

September Dixon: Yeah, so this is getting close to it, but not out in the woods 'cause you had to do the whole eastern side, northeast [00:52:00] or whatever, they had different regions. So you could go anyway, they'd "Oh, go to P. Go to PA, you'll be there in three days." "No."

Jaime: You want to keep it close to home.

September Dixon: No, I'll travel. I'll travel too but I don't want to be in the woods, yeah, no.

Paul: You want a bathroom.

September Dixon: Right. Who wants to be in the woods without a bathroom, a kitchen, nothing. You can't even microwave your stuff ... No, they might have that on the truck.

Jaime: What does it mean to be a union electrician [00:52:30] at that, a union [inaudible 00:52:33]

September Dixon: Right now I'm working with our [inaudible] and those are residential workers that were turned over into Local 3. We get to talk a lot from the non-union side to the union side. To be a union electrician, for me, from hearing their stories, [00:53:00] is to have more security, to be more secure. They have their healthcare now, they didn't have before. They can have healthcare for their children as well that they didn't have before. They make a decent wage. They know they can't just get fired like that.

So it's a secure position to come into the Local. Me, personally, [00:53:30] being a union electrician, means more so pride. We just had our rally for Spectrum last week and they're a part of us and I was very proud to see how many people came out. Although I heard the number was technically low, I saw everybody I

knew out there and that made me proud, like, "Yeah, we're still fighting. We're still [00:54:00] fighting for" because union dictates everything else.

Now with that being said, before union came into the picture, private jobs didn't pay as much because they didn't have to. Once we set a standard, they have to follow it to a certain degree because if they don't, they lose workers. The union, for me, has a lot of different [00:54:30] meanings, a lot of different meanings. I think of the Triangle Shirt Factory thing, different things where these people would have had more, not just more benefits or more security, but they would have been safe at work. We have to OSHA 10 or OSHA 30 if you're a supervisor. You have to take CPR. It's total different from working in a non-union environment. A non-union [00:55:00] environment, I've worked with some guys that have come from non-union and that have been hurt before and it's like they had no leg to stand on.

Paul: Scary.

September Dixon: Yeah, it's pretty scary.

Jaime: In the future, do you think that your children or other members in your community are going to do the same kind of work that you're doing?

September Dixon: I hope my son will. I hope he'll come into [00:55:30] it because he's so good. He's very good at spatial relationships. You think my mind is crazy? His mind is off the chain. His mind is, oof.

Jaime: How old is your son now?

September Dixon: He's 22.

Jaime: He's 22 and you want him to be an electrician?

September Dixon: Yeah, I want him to come in. I think he would do really well in this field, really well and I tell him that all the time. I'm like, "You will do great, man," but if he's scared, no, he doesn't have to do it, but I would like to see him fly in this [00:56:00] business 'cause I think he'd do really well, but anybody else? No. They're not interested. My family is very diverse and it goes from brain surgeons down to just retail workers or whatever, but no, they're not really into this kind of stuff.

Jaime: Your family?

September Dixon: Yeah. They're not really too much into ... I think we have another steamfitter [00:56:30] and maybe that's like it. They're not into construction.

Jaime: What advice would you give somebody starting off in the business first day?

September Dixon: Pay attention, always look up before you walk and just really pay attention. Be careful, don't [00:57:00] get hurt and pay attention to the lessons that are being taught to you by the journeymen that you're working with. Keep your area clean and learn your tools and you'll be fine. That's it.

Paul: What inspires you?

September Dixon: What inspires me?

Paul: Yeah.

September Dixon: I want to say my family.

Paul: [00:57:30] Yeah?

September Dixon: Yeah, anything I've ever done is for them. I miss my mom right now. I did a lot of stuff just because of her and ... yeah, just my family really.

Paul: Pushes you on.

September Dixon: Hmm?

Paul: Pushes you to keep doing what you're doing.

September Dixon: Right, my mom used to say, "Oh, September can do anything," like [00:58:00] I was a superhero or something.

Paul: That's cool. You sound like a superhero with all that you've been through.

September Dixon: Thanks, yeah, but no, I'm not. But yeah, that inspires me a lot.

Paul: Cool.

September Dixon: Yeah, let me go to class.

Paul: Thank you, September.

September Dixon: Thank you.

Paul: Awesome.

Jaime: Thanks for [inaudible 00:58:28] so happy to have [00:58:30] you.